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ABSTRACT

This paper, fourth in a series of five monographs prepared by Harrisburg Area Community College to illustrate how the college is attempting to "meet the changing needs of students," presents the counseling program and describes the creative approach being used. The program has three main divisions, consisting of the faculty advisors, division counselors, and central office counselors. Counselors' functions are discussed in this report under the general headings of (1) providing orientation and career information for students; (2) appraisal, testing, and record-keeping functions; (3) counseling and advising the students; (4) participation in student activities; and (5) making evaluations of the counseling program and other programs at the college. A new program to train student counselors is described in a section appended to the monograph. (BB)

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MEETING THE CHANGING NEEDS OF
STUDENTS: A Creative Approach to College Counseling

Monograph No. 4

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

APR 23 1970

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGE
INFORMATION

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PREFACE

The Harrisburg Area Community College will host a case study for the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in April 1970. In preparation, the faculty (through the Research and Development Committee) has elected to prepare five monographs focusing on how a new college has adapted its program to serve its students.

Recognizing that today's young people are different from previous generations, and that the Community College is a new kind of institution, the committee has chosen as a theme "Meeting the Changing Needs of Students." The five monographs are (1) College Governance, (2) Curriculum Development, (3) Variations in Methods of Instruction, (4) A Creative Approach to College Counseling, and (5) A Profile of Students.

No effort has been made to be comprehensive. Materials were selected for their interest or usefulness to others. Little self-evaluation has been written into the papers, but it has been a valuable by-product of their preparation.

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Introduction

Harrisburg Area Community College, sensitive to the truth that everybody, regardless of race, age, background, or ability level, must have an opportunity to maximize his potential, continues to broaden its educational program. The College offers transfer programs leading to a baccalaureate degree, career programs of technical and semiprofessional nature leading to employment, and continuing educational programs for adults. Equally important, the presence of the community college assures community access to social and cultural services that would otherwise not be possible.

As a result, diversity characterizes the community college endeavor and the "open door" admission policy insures it. This diversity presents many challenges and increases the demand for effective student personnel services.

Students who most need counseling and training to enter the mainstream of the American economy will be found in urban areas serviced by community colleges. Unless comprehensive counseling programs are initiated to personalize education and to counteract increased alienation produced by larger class size and greater enrollments, many students will be unable to accomplish self-actualization through education, or to translate their own skills into skills and disciplines demanded by society. The counseling staff, in collaboration with the student, can uncover the full range of educational, occupational and social resources that the student can use to define his self-concept and to strengthen his sense of pride. In summarizing the implications to the counseling staff of the growth of community colleges, Medsker (1965) writes:

Responsibility may fall to the student personnel service staff to find ways of personalizing education in what is becoming a mass enterprise. As Junior Colleges grow large, it will be increasingly difficult for them to retain their image as the kind of college which cares about its individual students, with a faculty which takes a vital interest in students. Counselors and other student personnel workers may in this instance serve as initiators and facilitators in working with the instructional staff to personalize education. In fact, this may be the only means by which a feeling of smallness within institutional bigness may be preserved.

A simplistic approach to the problems of increased enrollment, student heterogeneity, and educational diversity is to increase the size

of the counseling staff. However, this increase in bureaucracy without a change in the basic structure of personnel services may not aid the student (Schorsberg, 1966).

The structure of the counseling service at Harrisburg Area Community College represents a basic change in approach to meet the problems outlined above. This monograph is a declarative statement on those services and an evaluation of their effectiveness. The following outline will aid in the reading of this monograph:

The Tri-level Concept

Definition of the Tri-level Concept

Role of the Faculty Advisor

Role of the Division Counselor

Role of the Central Office Counselors

Financial Aid Counselor

Counseling Psychologist

Professional Staff Training and Selection

Evaluation of Services

Orientation Functions

Appraisal Functions

Consultation Functions

Participation Functions

Regulation Functions

Service Functions

Organizational Functions

New and Proposed Programs

Student Counselors Program

Developmental Counselor

Admissions Counselor

† A supplemental report is included for the reader's further information.

The Tri-Level Concept

The counseling structure of Harrisburg Area Community College can be divided into three somewhat overlapping areas of service. The first, "general services," requires no special training and is carried out by members of the teaching faculty. Curricular programming and

sponsorship of student activities constitute the bulk of their general services.

The second level of student services is provided by a masters degree counselor. (The masters degree is not necessarily in counseling.) It includes vocational, educational, and personal-social problems; test administration and interpretation; and relatively low-level therapy aimed at anxiety reduction, or in serious cases, referral.

Third-level services require specialized knowledge of admission records and follow-up, selective service and veterans' information, financial aid and psychological diagnosis, therapy, or referral.

This reorganization of the traditional counseling center approach produces a clearer role definition for those involved at the several levels, and by incorporating the teaching faculty in the counseling program, spans the breach normally existing between counseling specialists and the teaching faculty. The following section offers a more precise explanation of individual responsibilities under the tri-level concept.

Role of the Faculty Advisor

The Faculty Advisor serves chiefly as an instructor or administrator in the College, but he may also sponsor a student activity, be a faculty committee member or chairman, or be involved in curriculum development, writing or research. Advising students is probably second in importance only to his main function. He places great value on his efforts as counselor. Knowledge of career opportunities, educational requirements for careers, and courses needed for educational programs are all vital.

An attitude of empathy, patience, and helpfulness are prerequisites. The advisor must become acquainted with his students as quickly as possible and must be easily available, resourceful and interested in them. He investigates referral resources and consults division counselors whenever necessary. His main goal as an advisor is to promote self-understanding by the student and if satisfactory academic progress is not being made, to discover the reasons.

More specifically, a Faculty Advisor's duties are:

- to guide the student's program of courses and evaluate his progress,
- to help the student change courses when advisable,
- to refer him to others of the professional staff for advice,

to help orient him to all phases of college life,
to assist in job placement or transfer to another institution.

Role of the Division Counselor

The Division Counselor has a dual educational role: counseling and classroom instruction. He is primarily responsible to the Assistant Dean of Students for the nature of his counseling job, and to the Division Chairman for his instructional assignment. While each of the administrators involved has a primary interest in supervising the work of the Division Counselor, they are jointly concerned with the total work of this professional.

In providing counseling services to the students and faculty within his division, the Division Counselor helps students to reach greater self-understanding and develop realistic educational goals; he helps them with personal problems when requested; and he refers them to College and community resources for assistance in job placement, in personal adjustment, or in any other field required. To faculty advisors he furnishes background data on students, recommends curriculum development and course revision, and acts as a source of advice on referral and consultation.

In his instructional role, the Division Counselor performs all the duties required of any faculty member; to insure his optimum performance in both his counseling and his instructional roles, such duties are mutually agreed upon by the Division Chairman and the Assistant Dean of Students.

The Division Counselor is also an integral part of the admissions and registration team. He is responsible for helping each entering student in his Division to complete the tentative schedule of classes for his first semester. The counselor helps the new student to register and assigns an advisor to him. He provides admissions and registration information to the faculty members in his Division and may act in the place of the faculty advisor during vacations.

During the registration and admissions period, the Division Counselor is expected to keep evening hours in the Central Office. With the Division Chairman, the Division Counselor forms an important link between the Director of Admissions and Records and the faculty of his Division.

Role of the Central Office Counselors

The Central Office Counselor is located in the student personnel office, under the supervision of the Assistant Dean of Students.

He consults with students who seek help or are referred by division counselors or faculty;

assists with pre-admission interviewing, scheduling and counseling of special and developmental students;

serves as advisor to a number of special and developmental students; teaches Orientation 001 to developmental students and assists the Assistant Dean of Students in advising other professional staff members who teach Orientation 001;

acts as liaison with transfer institutions, and gives transfer information to counselors and advisors.

He also supervises the recording of data regarding student absences. (This includes notifying students about their absences and keeping faculty informed of student-reported absences.)

In addition, the Central Office Counselor helps in disseminating admissions and registration information to the Division Counselors and the faculty. He is available to help the Division Counselor in resolving unique scheduling and registration problems. The Central Office Counselor is expected to keep evening hours as assigned by the Assistant Dean of Students during the admissions and registration period.

Counselor, Financial Aid. The Financial Aid Counselor serves within the Student Personnel Division under the supervision of the Assistant Dean of Students.

His primary function is to administer the financial aid program of the College. His specific activities include:

counseling students seeking financial assistance;

implementing the system of financial assistance at the College, including public and private scholarships, loans, and federal and state financial aid programs,

by determining students' financial needs and, where possible, giving assistance through a combination of scholarships, loans, and work-study funds,

by maintaining liaison activities with the Business Office of the College which will be responsible for payment of all awards and collection of all loan repayments,

- by coordinating the College work-study program with the Division Chairmen;
- preparing reports regarding allocation of financial aid funds;
- reporting to the state the status of students holding state scholarships and loans;
- conducting all correspondence with private scholarship donors;
- assisting in the promotion of additional financial aid from community resources;
- preparing the financial aid budget request to the federal government in each fall semester;
- assisting veterans and veterans' dependents in obtaining benefits provided by the Veterans Administration and certifying their enrollment and status at the College;
- serving on the Student Affairs Committee of the Faculty Organization and its subcommittee on financial aid;
- keeping other professionals informed regarding the financial aid program, and coordinating the part-time and off-campus job information for students.

With the approval of the Assistant Dean of Students, the Financial Aid Counselor may also be called upon

- to counsel individual students and some special and developmental students,
- conduct pre-admission and course placement interviews with special and developmental students,
- teach one or more sections of Orientation 001 for developmental level students.

Counseling Psychologist. Students experiencing emotional difficulties that interfere with their adjustment may be referred to the counseling psychologist who provides growth experience for any student through crisis-counseling, supportive and extensive psychotherapy, and assistance in educational decision-making. Additionally, the psychologist may be called upon to teach a class or serve as a resource in other college courses. Because of the high ratio of faculty and administrative personnel to this professional, his services must be limited to core areas of: offering developmental and educational group experiences, expanding consultative services to the entire faculty, and providing training programs for student counselors and other paraprofessionals.

In situations where the student and counseling psychologist feel additional professional assistance is needed, a referral to a local psychiatrist may be made.

Professional Staff Training and Selection

In-service training of the counseling staff is conducted through staff meetings; individual conferences of the counselor, the Assistant Dean of Students, the Dean of Students, and Dean of Instruction; meetings involving the College counseling staff and high school counselors; meetings with college admissions officers; and meetings with authorities in the fields of personal adjustment, vocational counseling and education. Efforts are made to provide all counselors with current literature pertinent to counseling.

Professional development of the counseling staff is the responsibility of both the college and the individual counselor. Faculty members may receive financial aid from the College for pursuing additional studies. Counselors also are encouraged to attend professional conferences at College expense and to become affiliated with professional organizations. The College grants released time for attending meetings of professional organizations and allows the use of College facilities for hosting professional meetings.

Staff selection involves the Dean of Students, Assistant Dean of Students, Dean of Instruction, Division Chairmen, and the Counseling Staff.

Current members of the faculty who are interested in securing a counseling position must apply for the position in writing. The candidate is interviewed by the Assistant Dean of Students, the Dean of Students, and the Dean of Instruction. A division counselor is interviewed by the Division Chairman as well. Candidates are also encouraged to meet with members of the counseling staff to discuss the duties of the position with them. The final decision on hiring is made by all persons involved in the interview.

Candidates from outside the institution must also have a personal interview. In addition, a candidate must submit a written application, transcripts from all educational institutions attended, and personal references.

Candidates for positions on the counseling staff are considered on the basis of professional preparation, personal attributes, and interest in

counseling. The latter two points are as important as professional preparation, if not more so. In the case of a position within a division, the candidate must show teaching proficiency in an academic discipline as well as fulfilling the criteria for the counseling position.

Evaluation of Services

The tri-level concept is now well into its third year of operation at the College. To evaluate it, the twenty-one student personnel functions outlined in the report to the Carnegie Corporation concerning student personnel programs were used as a basis. The functions are organized under seven general rubrics:

Orientation Functions

Precollege Information. Information about the College is provided by sending the College catalogue to sponsoring school districts and brochures covering each curriculum to area counselors. On-campus visits allow high school counselors to confer with their former students on questions specific to their high schools, and with the College faculty and counseling staff. College personnel staff may also visit the area high schools to discuss college requirements and admission policies. Each year a Counselor's Day is hosted on campus to provide information to the sponsoring districts.

Student Induction. Each new student is required to schedule an interview with a member of the personnel staff. When his future plans are clear, he consults a counselor in his particular area of interest. The interviews are usually conducted before the student's initial semester.

Group Orientation. Prior to the first day of classes, all new students meet in small groups with their assigned advisors. The purpose is to promote good study habits, vocational-educational decision-making, and involvement in school and community activities. Where deficiencies are evident in his educational or social background, the student is encouraged to take a one-semester orientation course.

Career Information. Each division counselor maintains a library of career information in his office that is part of a larger collection in the school library. The library collection includes single-concept films. Career information is available to the student whenever required. Additionally, several seminars of the basic orientation course are

devoted to acquainting the student with the resources. A liaison is maintained with the local employment bureau and business concerns.

Appraisal Functions

Personnel Records. Admission and placement in the several programs of instruction is based on evaluation of high school transcripts, ACT scores, recommendations from teachers, and results of the initial counseling interview. A cut-off score of sixteen is used on ACT scores in conjunction with high school grades. A student with a score below sixteen is placed in a developmental course in the area indicated by the score. An up-to-date file is maintained for each student, including mid-term and final grade reports, test results, and comments from advisors and counseling staff. (Because of the confidential nature of these files, use of them is limited to advisors and personnel staff.) Two sets of these files are maintained — one in the central records office and a second in the division in which the student is advised.

Educational Testing — Applicant Appraisal. Decisions regarding admission to science, math and English courses are made according to performance on the ACT and high school records. As part of the orientation course, students are also given the Kuder. The Kuder or Strong may also be requested for students by advisors or counselors. For students manifesting behavioral problems, one of several personality inventories may be used by the counseling psychologist.

Health Appraisal. A health appraisal is required of every student admitted to the institution. The health appraisal must be completed by the student's family physician or a physician of his choice. Once the health appraisal is on file in the Admissions Office, the Director of Admissions screens the health appraisal, looking for two things:

First, what is the student's status insofar as physical education is concerned, that is, is he to have unlimited participation or limited participation? The Director of Admissions checks this information which is later screened by the Director of Physical Education, to ascertain whether or not a student is in the proper physical education course. In addition, the Director of Admissions screens the section labeled "Summary of Defects" to see what the physician's remarks are. This information is passed along only to those persons who need to know because this information is confidential. For example, if a student is a controlled epileptic, only those instructors who will have this student in class have access to this information. In addition the

counseling staff is informed. The key idea here is that the recommendations are carried out. Similarly the information is revealed only to those who need to know in order to protect confidentiality of student records.

Consultation Functions

Student Counseling and Advisement. Professional service is offered to the student having problems clarifying values, interests and attitudes related to his educational progress. These services are offered through central office counselors, division counselors, and the counseling psychologist. While the College does not require a behavioral science background of division counselors, it is felt that courses taken by counselors in this area significantly aid them in adjustment counseling.

To advise transfer students, files of catalogues of transfer institutions are kept in each counselor's office and in the library, as well as comprehensive guides to american colleges and universities. Each year, to assure the student smooth transition, these files are renewed in light of changing requirements and publication of new catalogues.

Applicant Counseling. Prior to formal admission any new student may have a counseling interview. Certain students, that is, those who are admitted into regular college curricula, are not required to have a pre-admission interview. Other students who do not meet the admissions criteria for a specific program *must* come in for a pre-admission counseling session. During the interview the student becomes acquainted with college programs and opportunities, but, more specifically, the counselor interprets test data and reviews the student's educational background and makes recommendations regarding a curriculum.

Once a student is admitted to the institution he is referred to the academic division of his interest for scheduling. However, if he is not admitted into a regular program he is scheduled by the counselors in the Central Office until he has met the criteria for admission into the academic program of his choice.

Participation Functions

Co-curricular Activities. As an inherent part of their responsibility, the faculty are encouraged to participate as advisors in student activities. The division counselor is also expected to involve himself in student organizations. Counselors have found the informal setting of

student activities such as dances, meetings, and field trips to be excellent avenues to meeting students and discussing problems that might not otherwise come to the staff's attention.

Student Self-Government. The Dean of Students is directly concerned with implementation of student self-government. The program of self-government at the College is one of increasing sophistication as faculty and administration become convinced of the value of student participation in college governance. To date the emphasis has been placed primarily upon student self-government. The Student Government Association, for example, is totally responsible for allocating the student activity fees which are collected by the College. In addition, the Student Government Association has been instrumental in setting up committees to write policy on discipline, policy for conducting certain activities on campus and policy for allocation of student funds.

The Inter Club Council and the Inter-Fraternity Council are totally responsible for "policing" the activities of the clubs on campus. Insofar as standing committee assignments are concerned, students serve on the Student-Faculty Disciplinary Committee and on the College Center Board. In both instances, students are in the majority and have a great deal to say. For example, in the case of the Student-Faculty Disciplinary Committee, this is the only body on campus that has the power of suspension or dismissal. On each of these bodies administrators serve in an ex-officio capacity only.

It may be noted that a specific attempt is made to exclude both the division and central office counselors from the area of discipline, in order to prevent potential conflicts of interest and to avoid placing the counselor in the role of disciplinarian. Insofar as the counselor's relationship to student activities and student government are concerned, this relationship is the same as with the overall faculty, that is, they may serve in capacity as advisors or chaperones on a request basis.

So far as institutional governance is concerned, motions have been made in Faculty Council to include students as voting members in certain aspects of government. A Joint College Governance Task Force has been appointed with the specific charge of making recommendations relative to the formation, composition and areas of responsibility of a Joint Governance Council. The Dean of Students is Chairman of the task force.

Regulation Functions

Student Registration. The key functions in the registration procedure are handled by the Director of Admissions. The Assistant Dean of Students is responsible for coordination between the student personnel staff and the Director of Admissions. Each advisor is provided with a computer print-out of his advisees before each semester. The computer also produces an up-to-date record of students' achievement twice each semester following mid-term and final examination periods. Appraisal of mid-term grades allows the division counselor to select students, usually those below 1.8 GPA, for consultation to uncover the source of their difficulties, and to advise them on future courses of action.

Academic Regulation. The duty of enforcing academic probation policies is handled by the Director of Admissions and Records and the division counselor. Each probationary student is called in for an interview with the counselor. Students on academic probation are limited to 12 semester hours; consequently, the interview may result in the student's dropping certain courses, but this action should be taken only after consultation with the division counselor.

Social Regulations. As noted earlier, counselors are eliminated from social regulatory functions for obvious reasons. However, communications are maintained between those performing these regulatory functions and the counseling staff, since disciplinary action may lead to a necessity for counseling. This liaison is provided by the Assistant Dean of Students, who supervises personnel staff and is directly under the Dean of Students. The Dean of Students is involved in all disciplinary action.

Service Functions

Financial Aids. Extensive financial aid is afforded to the student through state, federal and local sources. Because of the complexity of financial aid arrangements, a specific central office counselor is assigned the duties of financial aid. The College participates in the National Defense Student Loan Program (NDSL), which this year amounted to \$48,000. Additionally, federally funded student aid is provided in the form of \$12,000 in work study monies. Educational Opportunity Grants for underprivileged students amount to \$8,200. The nursing program is subsidized with \$6,000 in grants to nursing students. For students enrolled in law enforcement, LEAA grants or loans of \$32,000

are available; the grant or scholarship decision is based on full or part-time status. Local sources include \$7,000 in Harrisburg Area Community College scholarships to regular students and \$6,000 for developmental students. Scholarships in the amount of \$2,000 each are available to outstanding graduates of the community college. Student work funds of \$40,000 are also administered locally. The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency is currently sponsoring 160 Harrisburg Area Community College students at a total expense of \$60,000. An additional \$50,000 is also provided from PHEAA as loans. More than 20 local organizations contributed grants ranging from \$100 to \$500 to deserving students. A program not covered under scholarships or grants is the veterans' benefit program now including some 300 students of the College. The total student aid program, excluding G.I. benefits, administered by the student-aid counselor amounts to over \$297,000.

In-Service Education. Refer to earlier section.

Program Evaluation. Constant appraisal of the effectiveness of the counseling services is essential. It is accomplished in several ways. The first is a yearly evaluation of the on-going services by staff reports and student evaluations. Secondly, follow-up studies are done on dropouts, graduates, and transfers by the Director of Institutional Research, utilizing a full staff and computer facilities. This research results in a type of "criterion keying" whereby programs are revised in light of reported needs. Additionally, evaluation of incoming students' characteristics and comparative studies of students in relation to those in other institutions are accomplished through yearly compilation of ACT data. Local norms are also being constructed to facilitate the evaluation process.

In the spring of 1969 a canvass of the first group of students enrolled under the tri-level concept was taken. A Likert type scale was used, with scores ranging from one (1) indicating the most positive response to five (5) indicating the most negative response. All aspects of the tri-level program were surveyed, namely faculty advisors, division counselors, and central office counselors. All responses were positive at the three levels; the most positive was reported for the division counselors and central office counselor. The majority of those reporting showed a lack of knowledge concerning the services available to the student. Evidently a strong counseling program that is poorly communicated to the students suffers many of the drawbacks of weaker programs. Plans were then made to explain the program to the

students. Individual brochures, newspaper articles, group orientation, and reports in the campus newspaper were provided to clarify the program. A follow-up study of the effectiveness of this informative process will be conducted during the spring of 1970. Another index of counseling effectiveness is the drop in academic attrition rate from a high of 11 - 13 percent in 1966 to the present rate of 7 - 8 percent. This decrease is most directly associated with a stricter enforcement of probation policy and counseling related to probationary students.

Administrative Organization. For counseling programs to be effective they must be adequately staffed, housed and financed. A realistic allocation of monies for personnel services is 10 - 15 percent of the "total college budget." The percentage allotted at the College is 11 percent of the total, which is within the recommended range. Personnel staff is maintained at a counselor-to-student ratio of 1 to 200. The ratio is now approximately 1 to 180. Each division and central office counselor is provided a private office for counseling services. The counseling psychologist is housed in a separate suite to afford maximum privacy. Division counselors are located in each of the division bay areas. Placing the counselors in peripheral areas rather than in a central location makes them available to students and increases the feeling of staff accessibility. Taken together, research on the tri-level concept's implementation is very positive and encouraging to those involved. Communication of the program to students and community rather than basic structural changes remains paramount.

Placement. Locating employment and educational opportunities beyond the community college is done in two areas. The scheduling of appointments between individual students or groups of students and officers of transfer institutions is handled by the central office counselor. Vocational and employment information is provided by the division counselors, who are specialists in the numerous areas. The Assistant Dean of Students also serves as a liaison between outside firms and the divisions.

Organizational Functions

Program Articulation. For smooth transition from the feeder schools through the community college to the transfer institution or employment field there must be two-way flow of information. This program articulation has been covered previously in this monograph. It may be noted, however, that in a research questionnaire evaluating the

effectiveness of the personnel services students gave positive responses to questions concerning availability of Harrisburg Area Community College information in area high schools. Also revealed was an increase in positive rating on provision of transfer and employment information. These results taken together represent a very positive change in total articulation of the programs.

New and Proposed Programs

Student Counselors Program

At Harrisburg Area Community College it has been found that peers are often the first source of help sought during periods of psychological crisis, and that with adequate training selected students can function in a new paraprofessional role — student counselor. The student counselor program at the College is, at its most basic motivation, an effort in preventive mental health among the student population.

Training. The training program is geared to producing student counselors (from eight to ten, depending on need, resources, and availability) who can effectively relate to other students in need of help. During the training period, approximately 30 to 40 hours, the focus is two-pronged: (a) sensitivity training or the acquisition of interpersonal skills, and (b) change in the behavior attitudes of the trainee himself. The training program is built around the core conditions of understanding, regard, and genuineness, both in the didactic teaching for help and the experiential base provided the trainee. An overriding concern is the utilization of the training time available to effect as great trainee change as possible on indexes related to counselee and trainee change. In other words, the student counselor program prepares selected students to help other students.

Several new staff positions are being considered which will add to the effectiveness of the counseling programs.

Developmental Counselor

A new position has been added, that of counselor whose primary work will be with the developmental student.

In addition to teaching the orientation 001 class, this counselor will provide individual services for the developmental students, such as preparation of their initial program of studies and effecting curricular

change following successful completion of their developmental program. A regular part of this counselor's role will be to establish community resources for the recruitment of disadvantaged students.

Admissions Counselor

A position of admissions counselor is being considered to aid the Director of Admissions in providing information to students whose background may indicate potential difficulties.

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The Student as Counselor at Harrisburg Area Community College

(Supplemental Report)

by Robert Pyle

When we considered the numerous difficulties that many entering freshmen experience (especially those from a minority background), our responsibility to inaugurate a program of preventive or anticipatory counseling became evident. It seemed to us at Harrisburg Area Community College that the needs of our students were defined to the extent that a broad program of preventive mental health was not only realistic but could considerably reduce "unhealthy" responses to the psychological tensions normally experienced during the transition from high school to college. These frustrations are frequently most acute with those students whose life-style is significantly different from that of the bulk of the student population.

Reaction to Stress: A Model

G. Caplan maintains that an individual in resolving a crisis (an upset in his psychological or emotional equilibrium which is unusual for that person) tries various inappropriate coping mechanisms in an effort to reduce tension and return to a state of psychological equilibrium. (G. Caplan, 1962) If an individual is successful in reducing the tension which is precipitated by the crisis through adopting new and healthy behavior patterns, then the possibility that the same behavior will be elicited in the future to resolve a similar crisis is substantially increased. That is, the specific healthy response will generalize to his larger day-to-day experience. Obviously, this model does not account for all the various behaviors that a student may demonstrate. A similar crisis, occurring some time in the future, might result in a vastly different set of behavior(s) to cope with a similar problem. Following a traditional operant conditioning model, a stimulus, or crisis situation, elicits many response patterns, one of which reduces tension. (Caplan, 1961) Simply, the reduction of tension serves to reinforce or reassure the probability of a particular response, provided that the same stimulus and environmental conditions occur in the future. The point is that a principle can be derived from this set of conditions. The crisis situation can be a meaningful learning environment if the appropriate "healthy" response for reducing psychological anxiety is reinforced.

Of importance for our consideration is a related concept which, simply stated, maintains that there is a tendency for the individual to seek help from significant others as tension or anxiety rises during this critical period. At the College significant others include teachers, division counselors, peers, possibly parents, and student personnel workers. The institution's response to the need that existed for a peer counseling relationship was (and is) an attempt in resolving these several problems.

The peer has a marked advantage among these various significant others. Why? Simply, he is usually the first individual to be sought out by the troubled student and, therefore, may be able to propose healthy approaches or response patterns which have the effect of reducing psychological tension. At the operational level, the role of the significant other is limited in that he only provides the minimal assistance needed to guide the other student in a more appropriate problem-solving direction. This is effected by intervening only in those cases where the troubled student is observed to be using maladaptive coping responses. The several general functions of the significant other person should include (1) an awareness of predictable crisis periods (example: mid-term time), (2) know when (and how) to provide supportive counseling, and (3) help other students learn how to learn.

What are some of the typical crises associated with the initial contact with the new environment? Frequently, when the student leaves home for the first time he experiences culture shock (i.e. exposure to and contact with different ideas and people) as well as identity problems. That is, the experience of leaving the more structured home situation in which they were more dependent upon parents (or other cues in their subculture) for the relatively autonomous life on campus, even though they may return home for rest and food, is another area of dissonance that occurs between the ethical and social codes of behavior followed at home (especially if located in inner city) and those that prevail on campus. Many new students simply need a friend to provide support, guidance and direction in various problem-solving concerns, such as the drop-add process, location of specific student services, and in the visual recognition of professional staff members. In addition, there is overriding fear of failure. Most new students react rather strongly to the constant evaluation that they must undergo, especially that by a white, middle-class professor.

The Training Process

A number of lay as well as professional training programs have been implemented, but only a few have systematically assessed their results in terms of what actually transpires as related to a variety of criteria that measures constructive client outcome or change. (Carkhuff, 1968) Those that have assessed dimensions such as the counselor's communication of empathy, warmth, regard or respect, and genuineness, and, to a lesser degree, dimensions such as concreteness or specificity of expression, self-disclosure, and openness (the outcome research which is summarized in Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967, and Truax and Carkhuff, 1967) have yielded the following conclusions:

1. There is an increasing volume of literature that supports the hypothesis that lay persons (i.e. college sophomores) can be trained to function at minimally facilitative levels of conditions related to constructive client change over relatively short periods of time. Both carefully screened college undergraduates interested in school guidance activities and unselected volunteers from the school, hospital, and community at large demonstrate change in the direction of more facilitative functioning on dimensions related to constructive client change or gain in training periods ranging from twenty hours to one year. (Berenson, Carkhuff, and Myrus, 1966; Munger and Johnson, 1960; Pierce, Carkhuff, and Berenson, 1967; Wrightsman, Richard and Noble, 1966)
2. Studies indicate the greater effectiveness of lower level guidance training programs (i.e. where the emphasis is on "shaping" the behavior of the trainee) in effecting trainee growth. (Carkhuff, 1968) The point is that both trainees and clients demonstrate measurable personality growth when engaged in an action-oriented program (i.e. where individuals learn how to do something about problems, their own as well as others). Even though pertinent research is just starting to be replicated, there are several directly comparable studies. At the completion of training, using both identical and converted indexes, lay trainees function at levels essentially as high or higher (never significantly lower) and engage clients in the counseling process at levels as high or higher than professional trainees. (Anthony, 1968; Berenson et al, 1966; Carkhuff, Kratochvil, and Friel, 1968. In addition, a comprehensive

summary of the most recent research is reported by Carkhuff in the January 1969 Journal of Counseling Psychology.)

Trainee Personnel

Obviously the students employed as student counselors are, in general, less intellectual, less educated, and tend to come from lower socioeconomic classes than professional counselors, who by virtue of education and vocation are at least middle-class. A major concern was the need to engage only those students who are motivated to help by other than the all too frequent needs of the professional to find position, status, and perhaps some "handles" on his own psychological experience within the helping role. More often than not, the student counselor is simply motivated to help because he is most in contact with the need for help, for himself, for others. The problem largely focused on how to help selected students translate their natural concerns into a sound helping process.

Trainee Selection

While the selection process can vary, at Harrisburg Area Community College an intensified effort was made during the spring of 1969 by the entire professional counseling staff to select those students (initially eleven) who exhibited a sincere regard for others, tolerance, and ability to accept people with a different value system, a healthy regard for self, a warmth and sensitivity in dealing with others, and a capacity for empathy. In addition the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule was administered to each potential student counselor with the intent of assessing those dimensions considered relevant in the selection of individuals for a helping responsibility. (The E.P.P.S. dimensions were: autonomy, affiliation, intraception, dominance, and aggression.) Student trainees, ranging from self-selected volunteers to perceived psychologically "healthy" students, were able to effectively employ the training experiences which were provided them during May of 1969.

The Training Program

The student counselor training program at Harrisburg Area Community College is geared to producing student counselors (from eight to twelve, depending on population needs, resources, and

availability) who can effectively relate to other students in need of help and facilitate positive movement or growth. During the training period, approximately 30 to 40 hours, the focus would center around two phenomena: (a) sensitivity training or the acquisition of interpersonal skills, and (b) the change in the personality and attitude of the trainee himself. The training program is built around the core conditions of understanding, regard, and genuineness, both in the didactic teaching for help and the experiential base provided the trainee.

Simply, we were desirous that the student counselor trainees function effectively in their new helping role and, therefore, they were given considerable practice in that helping role. During the integration of various sources of learning, the trainees were exposed to those behaviors which promote help and to those which do not, being reinforced differentially. The training process most explicitly and systematically taught those specific skills that one considers important while providing continual support for those positive changes in trainee behavior which have been effected by the training process.

In summary, the person of the student counselor and the treatment which he offers appear to have the following distinctive advantages when compared to his professional counterpart: (a) the increased ability to enter the milieu of the distressed; (b) the ability to establish peer-like relationships with the needy; (c) the ability to take an active part in the client's total life situation; (d) the ability to empathize more effectively with the client's style of life; (e) the ability to teach the client, from within the client's frame of reference, more successful actions; and (f) the ability to provide clients with a more effective transition to more effective levels of functioning within the larger social system. (Carkhuff, 1967) Simply, the student counselor, when appropriately employed, can be the human link between an educational system and the needy.

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